

DOWN AROUND THE RIVER AND OTHER POEMS

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JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY



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DOWN AROUND THE RIVER

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY
"

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WILL VAWTER



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DOWN AROUND THE RIVER

NOON-TIME an' June-time, down around the
river!

Have to furse with 'Lizey Ann—but lawzy! I fergive
her!

Drives me off the place, an' says 'at all 'at she's a-wish-
in',

Land o' gracious! time'll come I'll git enough o' fishin'!
Little Dave, a-choppin' wood, never 'pears to notice;
Don't know where she's hid his hat, er keerin' where
his coat is,—

Specalatin', more'n like, he hain't a-goin' to mind me,
An' guessin' where, say twelve o'clock, a feller'd likely
find me!

DOWN AROUND THE RIVER

Noon-time an' June-time, down around the river!
Clean out o' sight o' home, an' skulkin' under kivver
Of the sycamores, jack-oaks, an' swamp-ash an' el-
lum—

Idies all so jumbled up, you kin hardly tell 'em!—
Tired, you know, but *lovin'* it, an' smilin' jes' to think
'at

Any *sweeter* tiredness you'd fairly want to *drink* it!
Tired o' fishin'—tired o' fun—line out slack an'
slacker—

All you want in all the world's a little more tobacker!

Hungry, but *a-hidin'* it, er jes' a-not a-keerin' :—
King-fisher gittin' up an' skootin' out o' hearin';
Snipes on the t'other side, where the County Ditch is,
Wadin' up an' down the aidge like they'd rolled their
britches!

Old turkle on the root kindo'-sorto' drappin'
Intoo th' worter like he don't know how it happen!
Worter, shade an' all so mixed, don't know which
you'd orter

Say: th' *worter* in the shadder—*shadder* in the *worter*!

DOWN AROUND THE RIVER

Somebody hollerin'—'way around the bend in
Upper Fork—where yer eye kin jes' ketch the endin'
Of the shiney wedge o' wake some muss-rat's a-makin'
With that pesky nose o' his! Then a sniff o' bacon,
Corn-bred an' 'dock-greens—an' little Dave a-shinnin'
'Crost the rocks an' mussel-shells, a-limpin' an' a-grin-
nin',

With yer dinner fer ye, an' a blessin' from the giver.
Noon-time an' June-time, down around the river!





ME AND MARY

ALL my feelin's in the Spring
Gits so blame contrary,
I can't think of anything
Only me and Mary!
"Me and Mary!" all the time,
"Me and Mary!" like a rhyme,
Keeps a-dingin' on till I'm
Sick o' "Me and Mary!"



ME AND MARY

“Me and Mary! Ef us two
Only was together—
Playin’ like we used to do
In the Aprile weather!”
All the night and all the day
I keep wishin’ thataway
Till I’m gittin’ old and gray
Jes on “Me and Mary!”

Muddy yit along the pike
Sence the Winter’s freezin’,
And the orchard’s back’ard-like
Bloomin’ out this season;
Only heerd one bluebird yit—
Nary robin ner tomtit;
What’s the how and why of it?
’Spect it’s “Me and Mary!”

Me and Mary liked the birds—
That is, *Mary* sorto’
Liked ’em first, and afterwards,
W’y, I thought *I’d* ort’o.
And them birds—ef Mary stood
Right here with me, like she should—
They’d be singin’, them birds would,
All fer me and Mary.

Birds er not, I'm hopin' some
I can git to plowin'!
Ef the sun'll only come,
And the Lord allowin',
Guess to-morry I'll turn in
And git down to work ag'in;
This here loaferin' won't win,
Not fer me and Mary!

Fer a man that loves, like me,
And's afeard to name it,
Till some other feller, he
Gits the girl—dad-shame-it!
Wet er dry, er clouds er sun—
Winter gone er jes begun—
Outdoor work fer me er none,
No more "Me and Mary!"





A GLIMPSE OF PAN

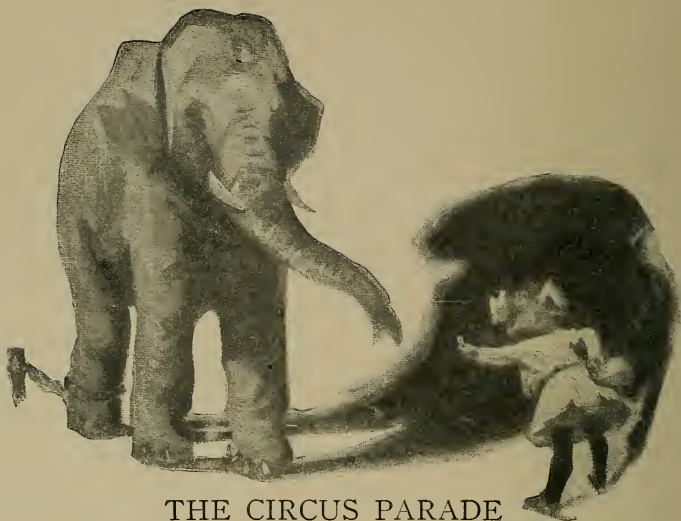
I CAUGHT but a glimpse of him. Summer was here,
And I strayed from the town and its dust and heat
And walked in a wood, while the noon was near,
Where the shadows were cool, and the atmosphere
Was misty with fragrances stirred by my feet
From surges of blossoms that billowed sheer
O'er the grasses, green and sweet.

A GLIMPSE OF PAN

And I peered through a vista of leaning trees,
Tressed with long tangles of vines that swept
To the face of a river, that answered these
With vines in the wave like the vines in the breeze,
Till the yearning lips of the ripples crept
And kissed them, with quavering ecstasies,
And gurgled and laughed and wept.

And there, like a dream in a swoon, I swear
I saw Pan lying,—his limbs in the dew
And the shade, and his face in the dazzle and glare
Of the glad sunshine; while everywhere,
Over, across, and around him blew
Filmy dragonflies hither and there,
And little white butterflies, two and two,
In eddies of odorous air.

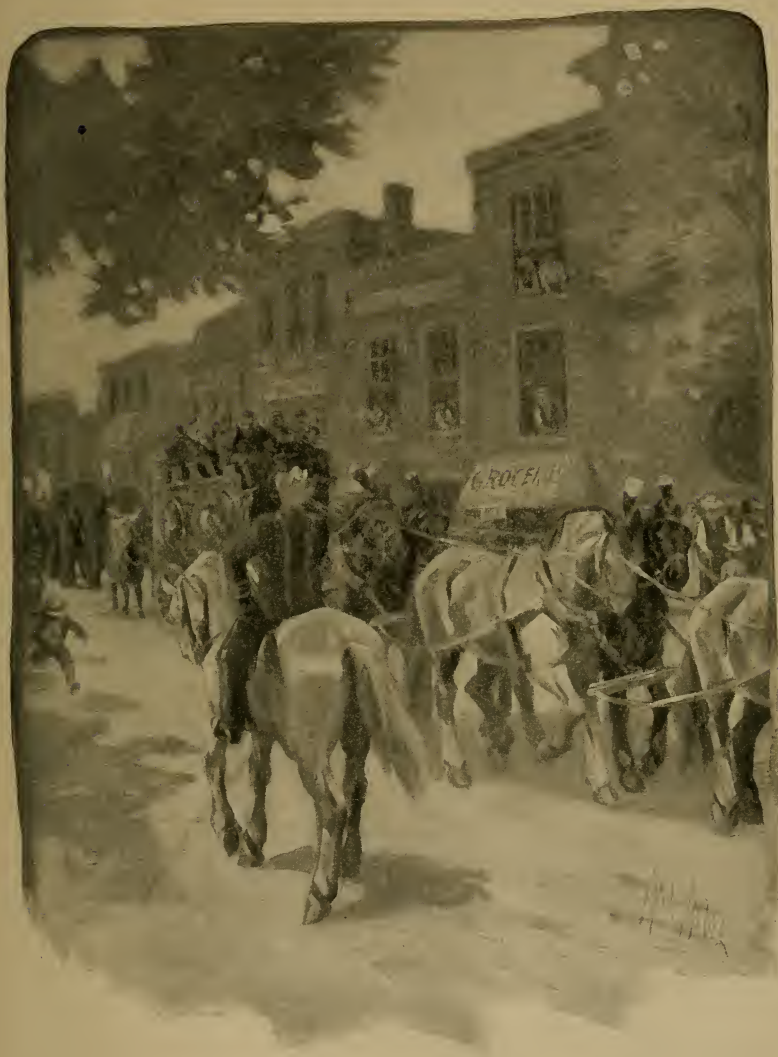




THE CIRCUS PARADE

THE Circus!—The Circus!—The throb of the drums,
And the blare of the horns, as the Band-wagon comes;
The clash and the clang of the cymbals that beat,
As the glittering pageant winds down the long street!

In the Circus parade there is glory clean down
From the first spangled horse to the mule of the Clown,
With the gleam and the glint and the glamour and glare
Of the days of enchantment all glimmering there!



THE CIRCUS PARADE

And there are the banners of silvery fold
Caressing the winds with their fringes of gold,
And their high-lifted standards, with spear-tips aglow,
And the helmeted knights that go riding below.

There's the Chariot, wrought of some marvelous shell
The Sea gave to Neptune, first washing it well
With its fabulous waters of gold, till it gleams
Like the galleon rare of an Argonaut's dreams.

And the Elephant, too, (with his undulant stride
That rocks the high throne of a king in his pride),
That in jungles of India shook from his flanks
The tigers that leapt from the Jujubee-banks.

Here's the long, ever-changing, mysterious line
Of the Cages, with hints of their glories divine
From the barred little windows, cut high in the rear,
Where the close-hidden animals' noses appear.

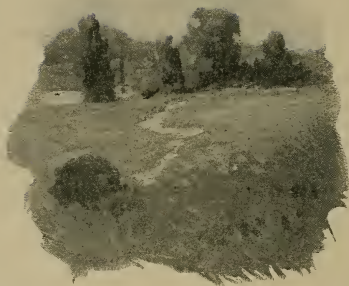
Here's the Pyramid-car, with its splendor and flash,
And the Goddess on high, in a hot-scarlet sash
And a pen-wiper skirt!—O, the rarest of sights
Is this "Queen of the Air" in cerulean tights!

THE CIRCUS PARADE

Then the far-away clash of the cymbals, and then
The swoon of the tune ere it wakens again
With the capering tones of the gallant cornet
That go dancing away in a mad minuet.

The Circus!—The Circus!—The throb of the drums,
And the blare of the horns, as the Band-wagon comes;
The clash and the clang of the cymbals that beat,
As the glittering pageant winds down the long street.





THE MUSKINGUM VALLEY

THE Muskingum Valley!—How longin' the gaze
A feller throws back on its long summer-days,
When the smiles of its blossoms and *my* smiles wuz
one-

And-the-same, from the rise to the set o' the sun:
Wher' the hills sloped as soft as the dawn down to
noon,

And the river run by like an old fiddle-tune,
And the hours glided past as the bubbles 'ud glide,
All so loaferin'-like, 'long the path o' the tide.

In the Muskingum Valley—it 'peared like the skies
Looked lovin' on me as my own mother's eyes,
While the laughin'-sad song of the stream seemed to be
Like a lullaby angels was wastin' on me—



THE MUSKINGUM VALLEY

Tel, swimmin' the air, like the gossamer's thread,
'Twixt the blue underneath and the blue overhead,
My thoughts went a-stray in that so-to-speak realm
Wher' Sleep bared her breast as a piller fer them.

In the Muskingum Valley, though far, far a-way,
I know that the winter is bleak there to-day—
No bloom ner perfume on the brambles er trees—
Wher' the buds used to bloom, now the icicles freeze.—
That the grass is all hid 'long the side of the road
Wher' the deep snow has drifted and shifted and
blowed—

And I feel in my life the same changes is there,—
The frost in my heart, and the snow in my hair.

But, Muskingum Valley! my memory sees
Not the white on the ground, but the green in the
trees—

Not the froze'-over gorge, but the current, as clear
And warm as the drop that has jes trickled here;
Not the choked-up ravine, and the hills topped with
snow,

But the grass and the blossoms I knowed long ago
When my little bare feet wundered down wher' the
stream

In the Muskingum Valley flowed on like a dream.



THE TREE-TOAD

“ ‘SCUR’OUS-LIKE,” said the tree-toad,
“I’ve twittered fer rain all day;
And I got up soon,
And hollered tel noon—
But the sun, hit blazed away,
Tel I jest clumb down in a crawfish-hole,
Weary at hart, and sick at soul!

“Dozed away ter an hour,
And I tackled the thing agin:
And I sung, and sung,
Tel I knowed my lung
Was jest about give in;
And *then*, thinks I, ef hit don’t rain *now*,
They’s nothin’ in singin’, anyhow!

THE TREE-TOAD

“Onc’t in a while some farmer
Would come a-drivin’ past;
And he’d hear my cry,
And stop and sigh—
Tel I jest laid back, at last,
And I hollered rain tel I thought my th’oat
Would bust wide open at ever’ note!

“But I *fetch*ed her!—O, I *fetch*ed her—
’Cause a little while ago,
As I kindo’ set,
With one eye shet,
And a-singin’ soft and low,
A voice drapped down on my fevered brain,
A-sayin’,—‘*Ef you’ll jest hush I’ll rain!*’ ”





IN SWIMMING-TIME

CLOUDS above, as white as wool,
Drifting over skies as blue
As the eyes of beautiful
Children when they smile at you :
Groves of maple, elm and beech,
With the sunshine sifted through
Branches, mingling each with each,
Dim with shade and bright with dew.

Stripling trees, and poplars hoar,
Hickory and sycamore,
And the drowsy dogwood, bowed
Where the ripples laugh aloud,
And the crooning creek is stirred
To a gaiety that now
Mates the warble of the bird,
Teetering on the hazel-bough.

IN SWIMMING-TIME

Grasses long and fine and fair
As your schoolboy-sweetheart's hair
Backward stroked and twirled and twined
By the fingers of the wind :
Vines and mosses interlinked
 Down dark aisles and deep ravines,
Where the stream runs, willow-brinked,
 Round a bend where some one leans,
Faint, and vague, and indistinct
 As the like-reflected thing
 In the current shimmering.

Childish voices, further on,
Where the truant stream has gone,
Vex the echoes of the wood
Till no word is understood—
Save that we are well aware
Happiness is hiding there :—
There, in leafy coverts, nude
 Little bodies poise and leap,
Spattering the solitude
And the silence, everywhere—
 Mimic monsters of the deep !—



Wallowing in sandy shoals—
Plunging headlong out of sight,
And, with spurtings of delight,
Clutching hands, and slippery soles,
Climbing up the treacherous steep,
Over which the spring-board spurns
Each again as he returns!
Ah! the glorious carnival!
Purple lips—and chattering teeth—
Eyes that burn—But, in beneath,
Every care beyond recall—
Every task forgotten quite—
And again in dreams at night,
Dropping, drifting through it all!





JUNE

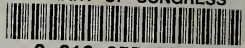
O QUEENLY month of indolent repose!
I drink thy breath in sips of rare perfume,
As in thy downy lap of clover-bloom
I nestle like a drowsy child and doze
The lazy hours away. The zephyr throws
The shifting shuttle of the Summer's loom
And weaves a damask-work of gleam and gloom
Before thy listless feet. The lily blows
A bugle-call of fragrance o'er the glade;
And, wheeling into ranks, with plume and
spear,
Thy harvest-armies gather on parade;
While, faint and far away, yet pure and clear,
A voice calls out of alien lands of shade:—
All hail the Peerless Goddess of the Year!

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